

William Berkeley Lewis to Andrew Jackson, April 21, 1833, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

MAJOR WILLIAM B. LEWIS TO JACKSON.

Fairfield, April 21, 1833.

My dear Genl. I have this moment returned from a visit to the Hermitage. I left home after an early breakfast and got up there between ten and eleven O'clock, where I remained until after breakfast this morning. It is with pleasure I inform you that I found every individual, big and little, well except Hannah, Sally's eldest child, and she, I was told by the overseer and her mother, was getting better. I had her brought to the house, so that I might see her myself, and ascertain, if I could, the nature of her complaint. I was apprehensive from what Mr. Holtzclaw told me, that she was afflicted with the *hip complaint*, such as Major Barry's son had; but on interrogating her and her mother, as to the origin of her disease, I am inclined to think it is something else. Mr. Holtzclaw and some of the black people think it is the *white swelling* she has. Her mother told me when she first complained of a pain in the hip she examined her and found a large lump in her groin, having the appearance of what is called a *waxen-kernel*. She also told me that she complained not only of pain in the hip, but also in the thick, or muscular part of the thigh, and particularly the k[n]ee. As I do not know how those who have the hip-complaint are affected, I cannot say whether these are symptoms of that disease or not. When she was first taken Sally tells me she could not walk at all and suffered much pain. She can now walk a little, and her pains are not so distressing. Indeed she told me she suffered little or no pain except of nights. I thought this, probably, was owing to her taking too much exercise in the day, and I told her she must walk very little on her leg until it got better. I also charged her mother to keep her from exercising too much. She is a very pretty little girl and, as she will no doubt make a

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valuable servant, if she lives and gets well, I have some thought of getting Dr. Hogg to ride up and see her, for I am apprehensive Dr. McCorkle does not understand the nature of her complaint. If she should require his personal attention afterwards, she might be brought down and left with her grandmother, who lives on Parsons lot, college Hill, and would take good care of her. The old woman (old Aunt Nanny you know) was up to see her not long since, the overseer informed me, and was very anxious to take her down with her, but that he did not feel authorised to let her go. When next you write to me let me know your wishes with regard to this matter, and Hannah shall be treated in all respects as you may direct.

The farm is in pretty good order. The fences all look strong and good, and particularly the outer ones. I was told by the negroes that nearly all the fencing on the Donelson lands had been repaired—most of it, also, round the caney field. I did not see them but I have no doubt it is so. Some of the fences around the lots and stables have also been repaired, as well as the outer fence north of your brick negroe houses. I think there is no fault to be found with any portion of the fencing—some few of the fences about the lots which need it, have not yet been repaired; but the overseer says he intends giving his attention to them the first wet spell. He has made you some 10 or 12 new gates and hung them. They are well made and well hung.

The House looks, I presume, pretty much as it did when you were here last summer. I thought perhaps it had not been sufficiently aired, and I directed Hannah who seems to have charge of it, to open the doors and windows whenever the weather is *dry* and pleasant. The yard and garden look badly—neither is attended to as they should be. This however, is more Dicks fault than the overseers, as he has necessarily been much and constantly engaged in getting in his crop, and withal I expect he has very little taste for gardening. I told Dick he must put the garden in order forthwith and keep it so, that the walks, border and squares must all be *cleaned* and *kept so*. The overseer promised me that in future *he* would pay more attention to Dick and the Garden, and yard.

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Finding the yard pretty much grown up with weeds; indeed the back part of it entirely taken with the green-planting, I directed the overseer to take his hows [hoes?] into it the first rain that fell and scrape the whole of it over, not leaving a weed or spear of grass inside of the Paling, in front or rear of the house, and to keep it so until the last of September, when he must chop it over lightly and sow it down, *thickly*, with good blue grass seed, unmixed with any other. These orders were given because I did not calculate on your visiting the Hermitage this summer, and by the next, if the blue grass seed comes up well, it will look much better than it now does, or ever has done.

As you requested I looked also at the monument, in the garden. Its appearance is very good, but I do not think it is finished entirely as it should be. The circular stones which rest upon the *columns* should also, be plaistered in the interior, as is the case with the dome above. This is necessary in order to hide the joints and rough appearance of the stone work. There are also many rough places and little holes in the columns themselves, owing to defects in the stones, which should be filled up and nicely painted over. In addition to this I would suggest that a neat little iron-railing be thrown around it at the distance of four feet from the base of the monument, and paved all round with nicely dressed flagstones, similar to those which cover the tombs. This would not cost very much, and would give a handsome finish to the monument which, I think, quite tasty and appropriate.

I sent for old aunt Hannah who has charge of the poultry and told her that you had been very much mortified at finding, on your return to the Hermitage, no fowls or poultry of any kind, for the use of the table; and that you wished me to say to her that you hoped it would never be the case again. She assured me that she would do her best to raise a plentiful supply, but said her chickens and turkeys died very much with the gaps, which with every thing she could do, she could not prevent. The overseer she said had built her a good house, and she expected now, she would be able to take better care of them. She has a very good stock of turkeys to raise from. I counted 12 hens and four Gobblers; and, as I understood from her, she has also, a pretty good supply of chickens etc.

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I enquired of the Overseer with regard to your horses, cattle, hogs and sheep. He told me his work horses were in very good order and were sufficient to tend his crop. He runs at this time, 17 ploughs, but says if necessary he can run 19. I sent also for Ben, who I was told had charge of the plough horses, and enquired of him as to their condition. He said they were all in pretty good order, and were thriving. He informed me that they had lost a young mule, but did not seem to think that blame ought to attach to any one. I saw *some* of the plough horses myself, and if the balance are in as good order they will do very well. The Overseer informed me that he had 60 grown cows and yearlings, and 22 young calves, making altogether, of all discriptions, 82. The cattle look as well as is usual for this season of the year. He has about 300 head of hogs; of this number there will be, he thinks, about 80 or 90 large enough to kill next fall which he hopes will be sufficient, or nearly so, for the use of the farm. he further informed me that of the 300 head, 109 of them were pigs not more than a month old. Your flock of sheep look very well. I enquired of Mr. Holtzclaw the number—he told me there were 92 old sheep, and 59 lambs.

I paid Dun a visit at his stables and looked at all his horses and colts, and I assure you I was much pleased and gratified at their appearance. The Horse, Citizen, is in fine order, and condition—he is really a beautiful animal. The two 3 year old fillies are also in fine condition. I think the one by Stockholder much the finest of the two, but the other is also a fine animal. His colts too (3 in number) are in good order, and very playful. Indeed all his horses, are quite *fat*, as much so as there is any use for. One of your mare's, the Overseer informed me, was in Williamson, and as he would have soon to send for her he wishes me to say to you that he would want some money, 40 dollars I think he said, to pay for her season and keeping.

Upon the whole, if Mr. Holtzclaw will hold out as he has begun I think he will make you a good crop, if he has a good stand of cotton and the season suits, and take very good care of your stock. He feels, however, considerable uneasiness with regard to his cotton crop—he is afraid his stand will not be a good one. his seed he says, were not good, nor could he

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get those that were good *anywhere* . He finished planting yesterday (20th.) while I was at the Hermitage. He says he could have planted a week earlier, but not having confidence in the soundness of his seed, he did not like to risk them sooner. He will finish planting his corn tomorrow. He tells me he has 200 acres in cotton, considerably upwards of 300 acres in corn and something like 120, or 130 acres in Oats. He has his sweet potatoes planted, and in the piece of fresh land on the left hand of the gate as you approach the House. I enquired of him particularly about your meadows and timothy. He says no hay, he is afraid, can be made off them. Indeed he says one peice (adjoining the lot Duns stables are in) was so taken with weeds that he found it necessary to plough it up and put it in corn. He thinks by tending it well this summer the weeds may be killed, and then, by sowing it down again in timothy, it might bring good grass. I looked at the ground, and from its appearance I have no doubt he done right in ploughing it up—it must have been very much taken with weeds. He has not ploughed up the other, but he is afraid it will not make hay. he says it was badly rooted up by the pigs and hogs last fall, and has now more weeds than grass in it. Your two fields of clover look very well, and a good deal of hay may be made off one of them (the one opposite the cotton gin) as Mr. Holtzclaw intends mowing it. the other, he says, he is obliged to pasture.

I enquired of Mr. Holtzclaw about the sickness on the place in the early part of the spring and the cause of so many negroes dying. He told me that he thought the cholera had visited that neighbourhood, and that some of your negroes had died of that disease, particularly Titus, whose death he seemed very much to regret, as he was a fine hand and a most valuable servant. He did not seem, however, to be satisfied in his own mind that either the girl, or the two Sampsons died with that disease. He says Dr. McCorkle saw Titus on the Saturday evening before his death, and said he was well again, and would be able to go to work on Monday morning. At 11 Oclock Sunday night he was a corpse. Now, my dear Sir, I doubt very much whether the cholera has ever been at the Hermitage or its neighbourhood. I heard of its being no where else, except a *reported* case on Major Donelson's farm. Mr. Donelsons negroe who was supposed to be attacked with

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the cholera, recovered and is now well, which I have no confidence in. I think Titus must have died of some other disease. I had heard at Nashville that Mr. Holtzclaw was very severe with the negroes, but from my own observation and what the negroes themselves told me while there I think, probably, he is not more so than is necessary. Where there are so many negroes, there must be a pretty rigid police. I told him what I had heard of his severity; but I hoped he had given no foundation for such reports about him. I added that you knew the necessity of keeping order on the place and among the negroes, but that I was sure that you did not wish, nor would you permit, your negroes, knowingly, to be treated with *cruelty*. I hoped therefore that he would not use towards them any *unnecessary* severity. He assured me that he had not, and would not. I told him if an overseer would be constantly, himself, with his hands, very little whipping would be required. The best way of managing negroes, according to my experience, was to treat them, *kindly* when they done well, and to punnish reasonably when they misbehaved; but that he might be assured that no negroes would conduct well who were left too much to themselves—that some one, for whom they had either respect or fear, should always be near at hand. He concured with me in opinion, and said that he scarcely ever was off the place unless obliged by business.

Your negroes evidently are better clad than they were under Mr. Steele's administration. They informed me they all got their quantum of winter clothing, and most of them have already been furnished with their summer clothing. I did not see a single child, even, on the place that was not well clad, and Mr. Holtzclaw informed me there were 58 of them. He keeps his wheel constantly going, and he informed me it spins 6, or 7 yards every day—besides the spinning ginney he says he keeps some of the old women spining by hand—and his two looms, he says are constantly going. I believe, my D. Genl, I have given you all the information I have with regard to the Hermitage, its culture, and management. If there should be any thing else you wish me to attend to, let me know and it shall be done.

My plaice, I believe, has fared worse by my absence than yours. My former overseer made me nothing the last four years, and on my return this spring I find nothing scarcely on it—

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stript almost of every thing. I have got, however, I think, a very fine young man, who will in this and *next* year be able perhaps to restore things to what they formerly were. . . .